

background notes

Afghanistan

department of state * march 1977

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Afghanistan

PEOPLE

Afghanistan's ethnically and linguistically mixed population reflects its location astride trade and invasion routes that lead from central Asia into the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Pushtun (Pathan), Tajik, Uzbek, Turkoman, and Hazara groups constitute the bulk of the Afghan population, with small groups of other peoples represented. The dominant ethnic group, the Pushtun, comprises about half of the total population. Afghan Persian (Dari) and Pushtu are the principal languages spoken, although Turki is also used in the north.

The principal cities of Afghanistan

are the capital, Kabul, in the east; Kandahar, southwest of Kabul; Herat, near the Iranian border in the northwest; and Mazar-e-Sharif, near the Soviet border in the north. Other cities with industrial bases are growing.

Afghanistan is a Muslim country; religion pervades all aspects of life, and religious doctrine and codes provide the principal means of controlling conduct and settling legal disputes. Except for a rather small urban population in the principal cities, most of the people are divided into clan and tribal groups and follow centuries-old customs and religious practices in the conduct of their affairs.



PROFILE

People

POPULATION: 12.7 million (1977 est.). ANNUAL GROWTH RATE: 2.4% (1972). DENSITY: 50 per sq. mi. (19 per sq. km.). ETHNIC GROUPS: Pushtun (Pathan), Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Aimaq, Turkoman. RELIGION: Sunni Muslim. LANGUAGES: Dari (Afghan Persian), Pushtu. LITERACY: 10%. LIFE EXPECTANCY: 40 yrs.

Geography

AREA: 260,000 sq. mi. (673,397 sq. km.); compares in size with Texas. CAPITAL: Kabul (pop. 603,969). OTHER CITIES: Kandahar (160,684), Herat (115,165), Mazar-e-Sharif (76,666).

Government

TYPE: Republic. INDEPENDENCE: May 27, 1919. DATE OF CONSTITUTION: Feb. 24, 1977.

BRANCHES: Executive—President; rules presently by decree. Legislative—New Constitution established "Grand Constituent As-

sembly" (*Loya Jirgah*), to meet on special occasions, and "National Assembly" (*Mili Jirgah*), to meet annually beginning in 1979. Judicial—New Constitution requires a Supreme Council to be established in 1978.

POLITICAL PARTY: New Constitution established single party, Party of the National Revolution. SUFFRAGE: All Afghans 18 and over. ADMINISTRATIVE SUBDIVISIONS: 26 Provinces.

FLAG: Bottom half of flag is green; on the top half are two horizontal bands, black and red; in the upper left corner is the republic's emblem—an eagle, a rising sun, and Islamic symbols—in gold.

Economy

(As a sizable portion of the economy is nonmonetized, statistics on production and trade are not fully reliable.)

GNP: \$2.1 billion (1975 est.). ANNUAL GROWTH RATE: 2.4%. PER CAPITA INCOME: \$125. PER CAPITA GROWTH RATE: Less than 1%.

AVERAGE RATE OF INFLATION (last 5-yr. per.): 10%.

AGRICULTURE: Land 15-20%. Labor

approx. 80%. Products—wheat, cotton, fruit and nuts, karakul pelts, wool, mutton.

INDUSTRY: Labor n/a. Products—textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, carpets, fertilizer, cement.

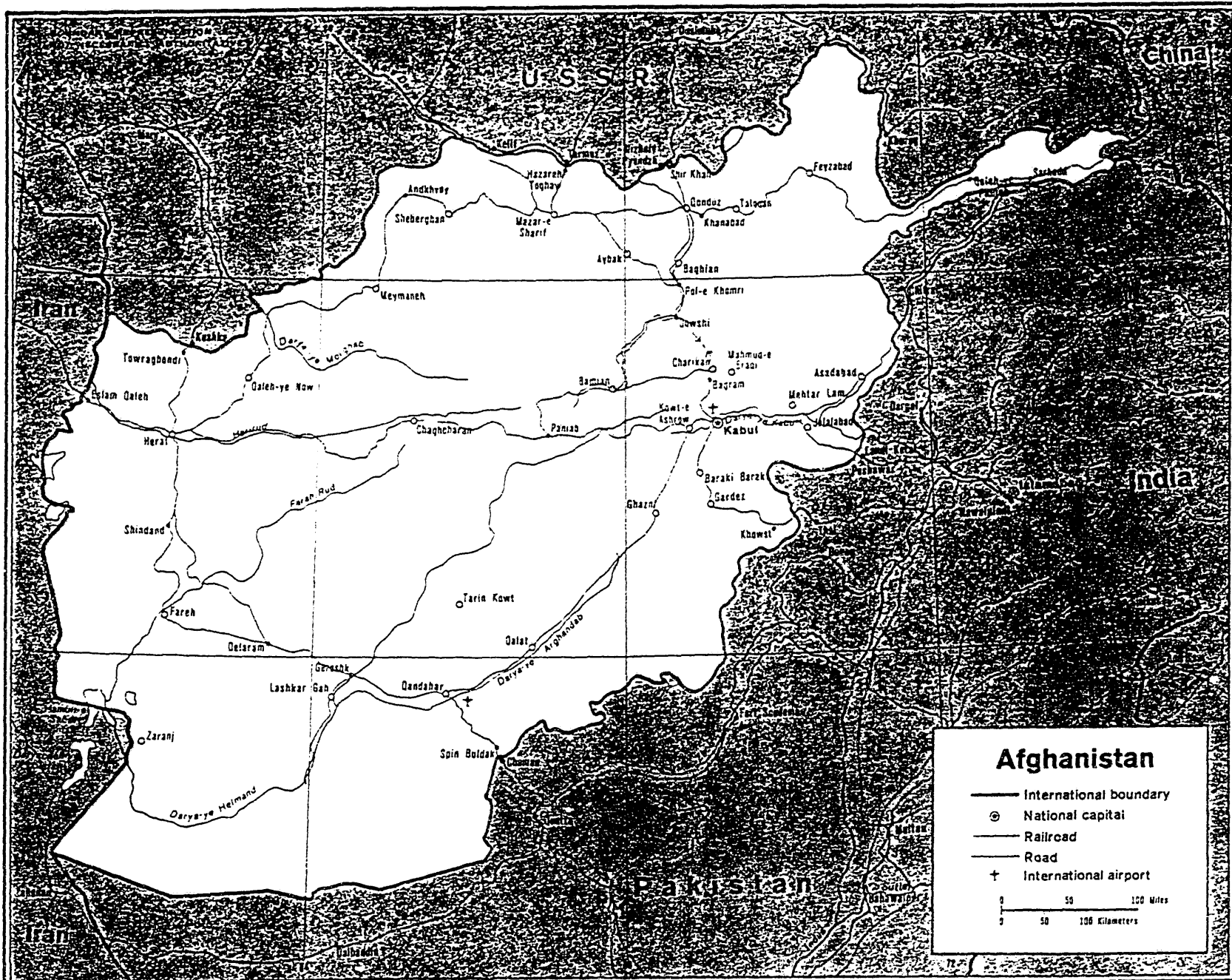
NATURAL RESOURCES: Natural gas, oil, coal, copper, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron, salt, precious and semi-precious stones.

TRADE: Exports—\$234 million (1975): natural gas, fruit and nuts, karakul pelts, raw cotton, carpets, wool. Partners—USSR (45%), US, UK, India, Pakistan, Iran. Imports—\$278 million (1975): capital goods, petroleum products, sugar, textiles, foodstuffs. Partners—USSR (45%), US, Japan, India, UK, Germany.

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE: 45 Afghani=US\$1.

ECONOMIC AID RECEIVED: Total—more than \$1.5 billion since 1950 (principally from USSR). US only—\$450 million (loans, grants, surplus agricultural products since 1950).

MEMBERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: UN and most of its specialized agencies, IBRD, Asian Development Bank (ADB).



GEOGRAPHY

Afghanistan is a landlocked country whose strategic location has had a major influence on its history. It borders on the U.S.S.R., Iran, Pakistan, and the People's Republic of China.

From southwest to northeast the country is divided by the towering—up to 25,000 feet (7,620 m.) above sea level—Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges. Mountains and arid desert country are interspersed by small valleys made fertile by irrigation from snow-fed mountain streams.

Afghanistan's climate is typical of the higher regions of central Asia, cold in the winter and hot and dry in the summer. Another characteristic of the climate is the range of temperature change within short periods, from season to season, and from place to place. For example, in summer at Kabul (6,000 ft.; 1,829 m.), the temperature may be 60°F (16°C) at sunrise and by noon reach 100°F (38°C). Kabul's mean temperature in January is 32°F (0°C). In the plains of Jalalabad (1,800 ft.; 549 m.), summer temperatures can reach 115°F (46°C).

Precipitation is scanty—rarely exceeding 15 inches (38 cm.) annually, most of which comes from October to April.

HISTORY

Afghanistan, often called the crossroads of central Asia, has had a turbulent history and has suffered many invasions. In 328 B.C., Alexander the Great entered present-day Afghanistan and, after crossing the Helmand River and the Hindu Kush, captured ancient Bactria (present-day Balkh). His rule was followed by domination by Scythians, White Huns, and Turks. In 652 A.D. Afghanistan fell to conquering Arabs, who brought with them a new religion, Islam.

Arab rule gave way to Persian rule, which continued until 998, when Mahmud of Ghazni (of Turkish extraction) assumed control. Mahmud established Ghazni as a great capital and cultural center, from which he repeatedly invaded India to spread the Muslim faith. Mahmud's dynasty was short-lived, however, and Afghanistan

was ruled by various princes until the invasion of Ghengis Kahn in the early 13th century, which resulted in the destruction of Herat, Ghazni, and Balkh.

Late in the 14th century, Afghanistan was again devastated—this time by the invasion of Tamerlane, who made it part of his huge Asian empire. In the early 16th century, Afghanistan came under the rule of Babar, who founded the Moghul dynasty in India and who is buried at Kabul, his favorite city.

Afghanistan was founded as an independent kingdom by Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1747. Ahmad Shah consolidated various chieftainships, petty principalities, and provinces into one country. From then until 1973, when the monarchy was overthrown and a republic was established, the monarchs were members of the Durrani tribe, although after 1818 they were members of a different clan.

European Influence

During the 19th century, as British power in India expanded and Russia moved into central Asia in its push to the East, the history of Afghanistan was significantly influenced for the first time by European countries. British efforts to secure a stronger position in order to counter Russian influence in Persia (Iran) and central Asia led to the first Anglo-Afghan war, from 1838 to 1842.

British anxiety over Russian advances in central Asia and Afghan dealings with Russia led to the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80), which brought the Amir Abdur Rahman to the throne. This ruler agreed to British control of Afghan foreign affairs.

World War I

During World War I Afghanistan remained neutral despite German intrigue to have the Afghans foment trouble along the borders of India. Meanwhile, nationalism was developing in the area. Amanullah, who succeeded to the throne in 1919 following the assassination of his father, sought to terminate British control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs. This resulted in the third Anglo-Afghan war, which lasted only a few months. Some initial Afghan successes persuaded the war-weary British to give Afghanistan

TRAVEL NOTES

Climate and Clothing—The climate of Kabul is similar to that in Denver but drier and dustier. Winter lasts from December through February; summer, mid-May to mid-September. Conservative dress is appropriate.

Customs—Entry and exit visas are required. Visas are sometimes issued for all modes of entry (land or air) and sometimes for a single mode of entry. Be sure your visa covers your planned mode of entry. Immunization against smallpox and cholera are required; if you cross Pakistan, inoculation against yellow fever is also required.

Health—No health controls or sanitary regulations govern the safety of foods in markets and restaurants. Water should be boiled, and fruits, vegetables, and meat should be well cooked.

Transportation—Neighboring countries provide flights to Kabul. Afghan airlines provide domestic service. In Kabul, taxis are used, but buses are often overcrowded and uncomfortable.

Telecommunications—Long-distance telephone service is available to most parts of the world but must be booked and paid for in advance at the central post office. Cables, forwarded from Kabul by radio, take 8-24 hours to arrive.

Places and Events—In addition to the sights of Kabul—where expert horsemanship is demonstrated during autumn "buz-kashi" tournaments—many travelers plan trips to see the great Buddha statue at Bamiyan and the nearby "Band-e Amir" lakes.

the freedom to conduct its external affairs. This event, celebrated on May 27, is considered to be its independence day, even though Afghanistan was never actually colonized by the British.

Reform and Reaction

After the third Anglo-Afghan war, King Amanullah set about making changes in his country. Moving from its traditional isolation, Afghanistan entered into diplomatic relations with the principal nations of the world. In 1927 the King made an extensive tour of Europe, an experience which fired him with a desire to modernize Af-

ghanistan. His modernization efforts, which included abolishing the traditional Muslim veil for women, alienated many tribal and religious leaders. This development, together with the depletion of the national treasury and the deterioration of his army, made him easy prey for Bacha-i-Saqao, a brigand who captured Kabul and declared himself King early in 1929. Nadir Khan defeated Bacha-i-Saqao on October 10, 1929, with Pushtun tribal support and was declared King, returning the crown to the Durrani tribe.

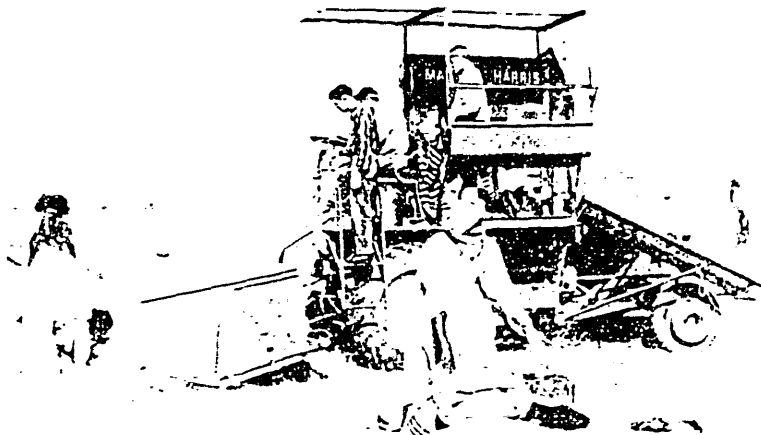
His son, Mohammad Zahir Shah, succeeded to the throne on November 8, 1933, after the assassination of Nadir Shah by a fanatical follower of the previous dynasty. Nadir Shah's brothers were Prime Ministers through 1952, and Zahir Shah's cousins, Sardar Mohammad Daoud and Sardar Mohammad Naim, were Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister from 1953 until March 1963.

With the 1964 Constitution as the vehicle, Zahir introduced a program of social and political reform under a more liberal parliamentary rule. In practice, the so-called Experiment in Democracy produced few lasting reforms, and frequent executive-legislative deadlocks delayed or blocked vital legislation. Under this more relaxed rule, which allowed political expression but which did not provide for a legalized political party system, the country's moderate reformers were increasingly overshadowed by extremists of both the left and right. A 2-year drought in 1971-72 worsened economic conditions. Amid charges of corruption and malfeasance, the monarchy was removed from power by a virtually bloodless military coup d'état led by former Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud, on July 17, 1973. The 1964 Constitution was abrogated, and Afghanistan was declared a republic with Daoud as its first President and Prime Minister.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

A new Constitution was adopted in February of 1977. It provides for a strong Executive and a single national party. The Constitution institutionalizes the historic *Loya Jirgah*—an as-

Mechanized farming techniques increase food production.



sembly of notables from all over the nation and persons prominent in government. A National Assembly will also be established during a transitional period lasting some 30 months.

At the time the 1977 Constitution was adopted by *Loya Jirgah*, Mohammad Daoud was elected President of the Republic for 6 years. The President is empowered to appoint one or more Vice Presidents, to serve during his illness or absence, in addition to a Cabinet. Succeeding Presidents will be elected by *Loya Jirgah*.

Principal Government Officials

President—Mohammad Daoud
Vice President(s)—vacant

Ministers

State—Abdul Majid
National Defense—Ghulam Haidar Rasuli
Higher Education—Ghulam Sidiq Mohebi
Education—Ibrahim Majid Seraj
Justice—Wafiullah Samayee
Interior—Abdul Abdulilah
Commerce—Mohammad Khan Jalallar
Agriculture—Azizullah Wasefi
Mines and Industries—Adul Tawab Asefi
Planning—Ali Ahmad Khurram
Public Health—Abdullah Omar

Information & Culture—Ibrahim Navin
Frontier Affairs—Ghausuddin Faeq
Communications—Abdul Karim Attayee
Water and Power—Juma Mohammad Mohammadi
Sec. Gen. Foreign Aff.—Waheed Abdullah
Ambassador to the U.S.—Abdullah Malikyar
Ambassador to the U.N.—Abdullah Malikyar

Afghanistan maintains an Embassy in the United States at 2341 Wyoming Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20008 (tel. 202-234-3770).

ECONOMY

Afghanistan is primarily an agricultural country. Only 15-20 percent of the land is considered suitable for farming, but there is no serious land shortage; as much as half the arable land is uncultivated.

Although reliable statistics are not available to determine the exact production figures, Afghanistan apparently was self-sufficient in foodgrains in 1973, not long after the end of a serious drought. A new emphasis on cotton production to take advantage of high world prices may reduce

food grain production somewhat, but Afghanistan is in a good position agriculturally, assuming continued availability of fertilizer.

The industrial sector, both public and private, is growing. Of the country's mineral resources, only natural gas has been extensively developed.

The national budget has averaged more than \$130 million in recent years. Principal expenditures have been for development, education, and defense, while the principal sources of revenue have been foreign assistance, income taxes, and customs duties.

Trade

With the development of its natural gas fields in the north, Afghanistan's largest export has become natural gas, projected at 2.8 billion cubic meters in 1974, principally to the U.S.S.R. Its other major exports are primarily raw and processed agricultural products.

The U.S.S.R. is Afghanistan's largest consumer. Besides importing Afghan natural gas, the Soviet Union also is the major importer of Afghan cotton, wool, and oilseed and has become an important market for dried fruit and nuts. The United States and United Kingdom are the largest importers of Afghan Karakul pelts, while the major carpet importer is Western Europe, especially the Federal Republic of Germany.

For many years the U.S.S.R. has been Afghanistan's principal supplier of capital goods, petroleum products, and sugar. Other suppliers have provided machinery and equipment, foodstuffs, petroleum products, and textiles.

Transportation

Communication facilities in the country are poor, but they are being developed rapidly. Although there are no railways or navigable rivers within Afghanistan, the Amu Darya River on the Soviet-Afghan border does carry some barge traffic. The primary road system is a circular highway connecting the principal cities. Most roads are unpaved and bridges are frequently washed out, but a number of projects financed by long-term loans from the United States and the Soviet Union have been completed. U.S. projects include the Kabul-Torkham and the

Kandahar-Spin Baldak roads (both facilitating communication with Pakistan) the Kabul-Kandahar road, and a road from Herat to the Iranian border. The Soviets have built a road and tunnel through the Salang Pass in the Hindu Kush to Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif and a road from the Soviet-Afghan border north of Herat to Kandahar.

The Afghan national airline provides international jet service to Europe, India, Pakistan, Iran, the U.S.S.R., and the Middle East. International service is also provided by Soviet, Pakistani, and Iranian airlines.

Economic Development

Afghanistan embarked on an economic development program in the 1930's. Banks were established, and paper money was successfully circulated. A university was established; primary, secondary, and technical schools were expanded; and students were sent abroad for higher education. Despite these efforts, illiteracy and lack of technical training still remain serious problems.

Industrial expansion has been limited by a lack of financial and other resources. In 1956, the government formulated its first 5-year economic development plan to assist in alleviating the problem. A much expanded, second 5-year plan began in March 1962, and 7-year development plan was initiated by the republican government early during 1976.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

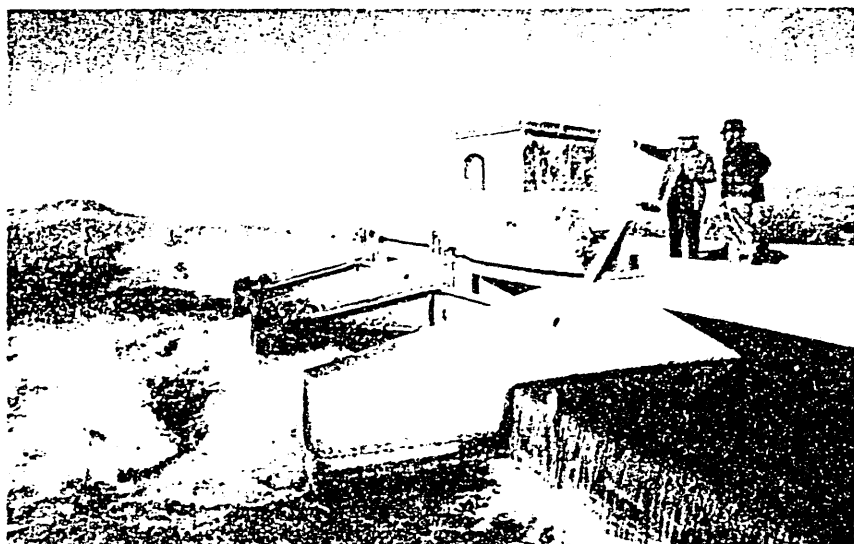
Afghanistan traditionally has pursued a policy of neutrality in its foreign relations. Within the past century it has served as a buffer state between Czarist and later Soviet Russia and the British Empire (now the independent states of South Asia). The country's geographic position underscores its continuing strategic importance.

Afghanistan's foreign policy emphasizes peace and the maintenance of friendly relations with all nations. In the United Nations it has generally followed the voting pattern of the nonaligned nations of Africa and Asia.

Afghanistan has accepted substantial loans and other assistance from the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. It also looks to other nations in the region, as well as to Western and oil-producing Islamic countries, for assistance to meet its development goals and to maintain its independence. Since his return to power, President Daoud has strongly reiterated his intent to maintain Afghanistan's traditional foreign policy of neutrality and nonalignment.

Pakistan

Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan have been complicated by its longstanding controversy over the "Pushtunistan" issue. The basis for this controversy was laid with the



Flood control gates, part of the Helmand Valley irrigation system.

establishment of the Durand Line (1893) following the second Anglo-Afghan war. In effect the line divided the territory inhabited by the Pushtun tribes; part went to Afghanistan and part to British India. The partition of British India in 1947 and the transfer of political authority over the Pushtuns in the old Northwest Frontier Province to the successor Government of Pakistan precipitated the current issue. The Afghans vigorously protested the inclusion of Pushtun areas within the borders of Pakistan without giving the Pushtuns the opportunity for self-determination. From the Afghan viewpoint it is an important problem.

As a successor power to the British, Pakistan regards the Durand Line as a legally established international border confirmed by successive Afghan rulers. The United States recognizes the Durand Line as the international boundary between the two countries.

Since 1947 this problem has led to incidents along the common frontier and, at times, closure of the border between the two countries has resulted in extensive dislocation of normal trade patterns. The most serious crisis in Pakistan-Afghanistan affairs lasted from September 1961 until June

1963, when diplomatic, trade, transit, and consular relations between the two countries were suspended.

Another deterioration in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations occurred following the return of Mohammad Daoud to power in 1973. This course was changed, however, when President Daoud and the Prime Minister of Pakistan exchanged visits during the summer of 1976. Both sides now seek better relations.

Communist Countries

Afghanistan had traditionally regarded its northern neighbor, Russia, with suspicion and caution, but relations became more cordial following the establishment of the Soviet Government in 1917. The Soviet Union was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, when the latter emerged from the third Anglo-Afghan war with full sovereignty in 1919. An Afghan-Soviet nonaggression treaty was concluded in 1921, which also provided for Afghan transit rights through the Soviet Union. During this period the Soviets provided some financial and technical assistance to Afghanistan, including training for a fledgling Afghan air force.

More recently, the Soviet Union has undertaken a major economic assistance program in Afghanistan. Since 1954, Afghanistan has received over \$1 billion in Soviet assistance and substantial Soviet military aid for training and equipping the Afghan Armed Forces. In 1973, Afghanistan and the U.S.S.R. announced a new assistance agreement of \$200 million. Current projects are focused on gas and oil development, trade and transport, irrigation, and factory construction.

Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, and the People's Republic of China maintain diplomatic missions in Afghanistan. Czechoslovakia has granted technical and military aid. A number of Afghan students are studying in Czechoslovakia and Poland. The People's Republic of China extended a \$28 million credit to Afghanistan in 1965 and new credit for \$44 million in 1972.

Iran

Afghanistan has maintained cordial relations with Iran, but until recently, there have been periodic disagreements over the distribution of the Helmand River waters that flow into Iran from Afghanistan. Since the advent of the



republican government in Afghanistan, however, the two countries have shown a desire to improve their ties. Iran has agreed to fund feasibility studies that could lead to the financing of transportation, agricultural development, and other projects. One of the components of the transportation project would be a railroad linking Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat and tying into the Iranian system.

U.S.-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS

U.S.-Afghan relations have been cordial since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1936. This warmth and mutual understanding were underscored by Prime Minister Daoud's visit to the United States in 1958, President Eisenhower's visit to Kabul in 1959, the visit of the King and Queen to the United States in 1963, and more recently the visits of Secretary of State Rogers in 1969 and Secretary of State Kissinger in 1974 and 1976.

The U.S. policy of assisting developing countries to raise their living standards has been an important factor in maintaining and improving U.S.-Afghan relations. Since the U.S. foreign aid program began in 1950, the United States has provided Afghanistan with more than \$450 million in loans, grants, and surplus agricultural commodities in order to develop transportation facilities, raise agricultural production, expand the educational system, stimulate industry, and improve government administration.

In the 1950's the United States concentrated on helping Afghanistan

build its economic infrastructure—the roads, dams, and power plants which constitute the basis of a modern economy. Recent U.S. aid efforts have shifted from infrastructure projects to technical assistance programs designed to help the Afghan people develop the skills needed to build a modern economy.

The Peace Corps is also active in Afghanistan. It began its activities in 1962 with 9 volunteers and now has some 100 volunteers in the country.

The United States also has active informational, educational, and cultural exchange programs in Afghanistan. The United States Information Service activities include press relations and film programs, an English-language teaching program, drama programs, a library, seminars, lectures, and cultural and educational exchange programs. The Afghan-American Educational Commission (AFAMEC) was established in 1963 to administer binational educational exchange programs such as the Fulbright program and other public and privately funded educational exchanges.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Deputy Chief of Mission—R.T. Curran
Political Counselor—William H. Hallman
Economic Counselor—Carroll Floyd
Director, U.S. AID Mission—Frederick H. Sligh (Acting)
Defense and Army Attaché—Col. William P. Servell
Public Affairs Officer—Roger M. Lydon

READING LIST

These titles are provided as a general indication of the material published on Afghanistan. The Department of State does not endorse the specific views in unofficial publications as representing the position of the US Government.

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Peace Corps Director—George Baldino

The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan is located at Ansari Wat, Karte-E Wali, Kabul. Telephone: 24231 through 24239.

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